



**Testimony of Abraham Scarr, Director
Connecticut Public Interest Research Group (ConnPIRG)
in support of**

**Proposed Governor's Bill No. 27:
An Act Concerning Connecticut's Recycling and Materials Management Strategy**

Chairperson Meyer, Chairperson Gentile and Members of the Committee: My name is Abe Scarr and I am the Director of the Connecticut Public Interest Research Group (ConnPIRG). Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of Proposed Governor's Bill No. 27: An Act Concerning Connecticut's Recycling and Materials Management Strategy.

ConnPIRG is a non-profit, non-partisan consumer group. Our Zero Waste Program works to protect public health and boost our economy by decreasing waste and increasing reuse, recycling, and composting.

I applaud Governor Malloy and his staff, Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) Commissioner Klee and DEEP staff, Speaker Sharkey, Majority Leader Aresimowicz, Senate President Pro Tem Williams, and Majority Leader Looney for their support of this important piece of legislation.

ConnPIRG strongly supports proposed Governor's Bill 27. While we share some of the concerns and ideas for improvement of other stakeholders, which I will outline below, we fully support the topline goals and strategies adopted by the bill.

The reasons for our strong support can best be understood by zooming out to the big picture.

Start with the question: why is Connecticut's recycling rate so low?

Connecticut's recycling rate was 21% in 1993, 24% in 2003, and 25% in 2010¹. By comparison, Massachusetts recycling rate was 42% in 2009².

The answer is that our over-reliance on incineration has provided a direct and strong disincentive to recycle. Connecticut burns more trash per person than any other state in the country. Incinerators are a public health threat, expensive to taxpayers, and a waste of valuable resources.

¹ <http://www.connpirg.org/reports/ctf/zero-waste-solution>

² <http://www.mass.gov/eea/docs/dep/recycle/priorities/swmp13f.pdf>

Connecticut made a decision forty years ago to transform its approach to waste management by phasing out landfills and investing in incinerators. Because incinerators are expensive to build, operate, and maintain, the legislature created a quasi-public agency, the Connecticut Resources Recovery Authority (CRRA). CRRA was given bonding authority, which it used to build four of the state's six incinerators. CRRA also entered into generous long contracts with cities and towns that guaranteed years of revenue to pay back those bonds.

This investment in incineration has locked Connecticut into high waste and low recycling rates. Because incinerators must operate at or close to capacity, there is a constant need to "feed the beast." So long as we maintain our current infrastructure, these fundamentals will stay the same and we will continue to see high waste and low recycling rates. When all you have is a hammer, all you see is nails. When all you have is incinerators, all you see is waste to burn.

It is long past time to adopt new tools, which is why the proposal to repurpose the incinerator in Hartford is the most important proposal in Governor's Bill 27. We will only be able to accomplish our goal of 60% diversion by 2024 by removing incinerator capacity and replacing it with reuse, recycling, and composting capacity. The CRRA incinerator in Hartford is the perfect candidate to retire first as it is old, inefficient and under public control.

Just as we transformed our waste management strategy forty years ago, it is time to transform again, from managing waste to managing materials. The material we currently burn in incinerators does not need to be wasted. A quarter of it is organic material that can be composted; another quarter is paper that can be recycled, and so on. By reducing the amount of waste we use in the first place, reusing what we can, and recycling and composting what's left, we have the tools to get to zero waste.

In making this transition, we save money on the front end and stimulate the economy on the back end. Waste collection and disposal is a significant cost for cities and towns and the market value of recycled material helps offset those costs, saving taxpayers money. Recycling sustains 10 times more jobs per ton of material than incineration or landfills. For every job created by burning and burying waste, 25 recycling-based manufacturing jobs can be created from the same amount of material.³ The two mattress recycling businesses that started in anticipation of Connecticut's Mattress Stewardship bill are an excellent example of how recycling transforms a waste disposal problem into an economic development opportunity.

This transformation will not be simple or happen overnight, and there are many important details to be worked out, but is without question the right direction to go, which is why we strongly support Governor's Bill 27.

Detailed Recommendations

While our testimony focuses on what we see as the most significant sections (2 and 3), we will also note our support for the changes to CRRA's name, responsibilities, and powers, as well as for the creation of the Connecticut Recycling Foundation.

³ <http://www.recyclingworkscampaign.org/recycling-works-fast-facts/>

Section 2

- While the goal of 60% diversion by 2024 is good, the state should be shooting higher: 80% by 2030. We suggest language that directs DEEP to re-review the goal at a specific time and recommend to the General assembly a new, higher, goal.
- The bill lists strategies the new Solid Waste Management Plan should pursue in order to hit the 60% goal, including modernizing infrastructure, diverting organic material, and promoting construction and demolition recycling. It should also include waste reduction policies and product stewardship. At the end of the day, reuse and recycling is not enough. We need to reduce the amount of material we use in the first place and redesign products to use less, be more durable, and be easier to reuse and recycle. The producers of material goods must share the responsibility for their end of life management. DEEP is, to its credit, already moving in this direction, and adding this language would bolster its efforts.
- The bill says that DEEP should consult with municipalities in developing the new Solid Waste Management Plan. It should also include a method for public participation and consultation.

Section 3

- The bill gives DEEP the authority to issue a request for proposals and to make the final decision of which vendor will “repurpose” the Hartford incinerator. There should be some mechanism for public and stakeholder input in this very important decision. Stakeholder and public opportunities for input should be substantial and meaningful, but they should not allow entrenched interests to retard the process or protect the status quo.
- The bill lists several factors DEEP should consider when choosing a vendor and provides good direction. We recommend adding the consideration of how well the proposal would allow state to meet higher diversion goals in the future. This transformation will mean little if we replace one disposal facility with another.

Section 5

- The bill does not adequately change CRRRA’s mission to fit its new direction. The authority’s purpose should be updated to place a higher emphasis on materials management, waste reduction, reuse, recycling, and composting.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of Governor’s Bill 27.

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